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Digital Stewardship: Implications for the Information Professions' curriculum

As we increasingly see our cultural heritage institutions – galleries, libraries archives and museums (or GLAM) - converging in the digital environment, the significance for LIS education cannot be underestimated. With emerging new roles and areas of practice, we are being lead further down the path of a truly all-rounded 'information professional.'

One such emerging and evolving area of practice is what the authors refer to as 'digital stewardship'. Encompassing more than digital curation and digital preservation, digital stewardship takes a more holistic view of data creation, maintenance, preservation, dissemination and exhibition. It is concerned with all practices and issues that the professionals in these roles may experience, including an understanding of user requirements and the historical, social and policy contexts in which the data was created and in which these professionals now operate. In the cultural heritage environment, this includes ensuring that the digital objects we create today will still exist and be usable in the future.

Two major projects that informed the development of the digital stewardship pedagogy discussed in this paper are the *Digital Library Curriculum Project* (<http://curric.dlib.vt.edu/>) and the *Digital Curation Curriculum Project* (known as *DigCCur*) (<http://www.ils.unc.edu/digccurr/>) that investigates digital curation, preservation and stewardship. Based on documentation available on the web in January and February of 2010, the authors analysed the courses available in digital preservation, curation and stewardship offered in the United States, Canada and Europe. Acknowledging the limitations of this type of analysis (limited information available on the websites), they nevertheless noted a lack of focus on users/user communities, contexts and history. They argue that in any digital stewardship curriculum, "content cannot be separated from context, and there must be a significant emphasis on the role of policies [and] the demands of social issues" (p. 616). It is further noted that other courses – such as digital libraries, electronic records and information media – incorporate aspects of digital preservation within their subject matter, further evidence of the blurring 'information professional' boundaries.

As a result of their investigations, the *Digital Curriculum Laboratory* (DCL) was created at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College. Although experimental, it is a key component of the newly developed "Cultural Heritage Informatics curriculum, specifically designed to address the digital convergence of cultural heritage institutions" (p. 616). The DCL provides a hands-on, virtual space, where students can interact and experiment with a range of software tools and content, gaining experience with various digital archiving processes and procedures. It allows educators to integrate a much stronger user focus into the curriculum – something that was highlighted as missing from existing curricula of our northern hemisphere colleagues.

The digital environment has brought with it a range of issues for many areas of the LIS curriculum, challenging educators worldwide to remain not current, but ahead of the game. Any emerging area brings new challenges and exciting opportunities, and digital stewardship is no exception.

You can read the full article via the ALIA online journals at

<http://www.alia.org.au/onlineLISresources>

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